# Grampaw Pettibone

*Illustrations by* Ted Wilbur

## Knock It Off

A fleet F/A-18 Hornet squadron sent a detachment to sea for carrier quals. A nugget who had only been in the squadron five weeks launched at approximately 0130 on his third flight of the day. The pilot reported to the carrier air traffic control center that he was ready for a turn downwind. Between that turn and the four-nautical-mile turn to final, the nugget dumped fuel to max trap weight, made two configuration changes, and, at the carrier air traffic control center's (CATCC) request, cycled his Mode "C" twice. The pilot flew a below-average instrument approach and showed up on the ball with his wingtip lights extremely dim, which significantly degraded the landing signal officer's (LSO) depth perception.

The pilot, who later reported that he was feeling "a little exhausted," flew a poor final approach, which culminated in an excessive sink rate close to the ramp. The LSO activated the wave-off lights less than two seconds prior to the jet striking the ramp. The jet hit 10 feet down the round down, on centerline, with both main mounts below the edge of the flight deck. The right main landing gear and tailhook were damaged by the impact. The hook engaged the three wire, but the hook point broke. The pilot executed bolter procedures and was instructed to divert to his home field.

When he arrived at the home field, another pilot joined on him to assess the damage. The right main landing gear wheel and tire were canted 45 degrees inboard. The pilot performed a straight landing to the left side of the runway in accordance with NATOPS. As the jet slowed, it developed an uncontrollable right drift. The pilot ejected as the jet departed the runway. The pilot sustained major injuries; the jet was destroyed.

When they launched, both the mishap pilot and his lead were on their third flight of the day and more than 12 hours crew day. Both pilots violated the squadron standard operating procedures on both counts. Prior to launch, the det. officer in charge tried to contact the squadron commanding officer for a waiver for the pilots, but was unable to reach him. The officer reported this to the pilots, but they elected to launch and no one stopped them.

**Grampaw Pettibone says:**

**Good judgment comes from experience. Unfortunately, experience often comes from bad judgment. Kids, Ol' Gramps realizes that mistakes happen, but nothing bakes my beans like a willful disregard of the rules. Several people involved with this one deliberately ignored a host of standard procedures, and we lost a jet and durn near lost one of our finest as a result!**

**This wee lad was set up for failure from the get go. We got a flight lead who set a poor example by violating squadron procedures and allowing his wet-behind-the-ears wingie to do the same. We got an officer in charge who doesn't seem to realize what bein' in charge is all about, and we got paddles back there on his platform who is willing to wave a jet he can barely see. Someone should have called "knock it off!" on this one. Our nugget was fatigued and in over his head. The officer in charge and lead never should have let him go flying. What's more, allowing him to take an immediate turn downwind and a four-mile hook was a bad call. That goofy light set up made it perty near impossible for paddles to figure out where that jet was heading. He should have had CATCC pull the jet off the approach, fix his lights, and try again.**

**Make a circle kids and lets learn today's lesson: When you are close to the line on a rule, think very carefully before you take your next step. Think about the example you are setting and what can go wrong. One of the hardest parts about being a leader is making the right call when it goes contrary to getting the job done.**

**Now you kids skeedaddle, Gramps has some whittlin' he needs to finish.**

# *Gramps from Yesteryear...*

## Would You Believe VFR?

The lieutenant ferry pilot was delivering a UH-1N Huey from NAS Midwest to NAS Atlantic Coast. During one of his en route stops, a phone call home revealed a close relative was in the hospital, so he decided to stay overnight at a civilian field. Following the visit and six hours' sleep, he and his enlisted crew member arose at 0630, ate breakfast, and arrived back at the field at 0710. The pilot conducted a preflight and completed a visual flight rules (VFR) flight plan to his ultimate destination with a fuel stop en route.

He obtained his weather brief, via the radio of a Cessna 150 on the deck, by contacting the flight service station approximately 35 miles away. The airport manager estimated the weather at the field as 200 feet scattered, 400 feet broken, and one-to-two miles' visibility. (This was substantiated by a pilot report ten minutes after the Huey took off.) The poorest weather forecast for the route was for a station 20 miles away that was forecasting 800 feet overcast, visibility two miles, with light rain and fog; occasionally 400 overcast, visibility one mile, in light rain and fog.

The lieutenant and crew member manned the aircraft, conducted pre-takeoff checks, and departed VFR at 0815. The Huey climbed to 500 feet on an easterly heading. When approximately ten miles out, the pilot spotted a low cloud layer and descended to 300 feet above ground level to stay VFR. After passing under the clouds he climbed to 500 feet again. About 15 miles out, another low cloud layer appeared, and the pilot descended to 200 feet and slowed to 80 knots. At this time, the helo entered instrument flight rules conditions. There was a five-degree disparity between the pilot and copilot attitude gyro.

At 200 feet, the pilot, now suffering from an extreme case of vertigo, descended again, attempting to regain VFR conditions. The crew member saw that the aircraft was rapidly approaching the trees and told the pilot of the impending ground contact. He immediately initiated a high flare, which decreased his forward speed. The aircraft gained a five-to-ten knot aft motion and hit the trees, tearing off 15 feet of the tail boom. The uninjured crew left the aircraft as a small fire developed in the aft section. An outside witness notified the local fire department; the pilot and crew member were examined at a local hospital and released.

**Grampaw Pettibone said:**

**Dad blasted! In spite of all the "tales of woe" we have seen about aviators trying to sneak under the weather—they are still doing it! With the type of weather existing and forecast, it was sheer stupidity—of the highest order—to attempt this flight VFR.**

**In addition, this lad, knowin' that he was going to be flyin' at minimum altitude on this trip, didn't even bother to write down the terrain heights or clearances on his preflight card! I don't believe it!! This pilot's instrument experience compares with the least I've ever seen for a gent of his seniority level! To top it off, his unit issued him an instrument card—when he hadn't met even the minimums. (Sounds like a supervisory problem.) And one gent tried to alibi that by pointing out the number of night helo combat hours the pilot had! I sure don't remember anything in 3710.7F about nighttime substituting for instrument time. The instrument time require in OpNavInst 3710.7F is a minimum, and every aviator should have more—but at least that!**

**There were just too many things wrong with this whole fiasco. Goes to show ya. Accidents don't just happen, they are caused!**